

DOCUMENTARY NEWS LETTER

JANUARY 1941

DOCUMENTARY—THE CREATIVE INTERPRETATION OF REALITY

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Bruce Woolfe

BRUCE WOOLFE will always be remembered as the man to whose initiative we owe the unbroken series of *Secrets of Nature* films of which 1940 marked the twenty-first anniversary. It would be impertinent for us to recapitulate for D.N.L. readers the educational—let alone the æsthetic—value of the series. These films, with the aid of Percy Smith's greenhouse-full of gadgets, have revealed to us, in a manner possible by no other medium than the film, the secret and beautiful pattern of natural growth, the terrifying and inevitable cruelty of the biological pattern; they have increased our knowledge together with our sense of wonderment; and often enough they have pointed a moral (not with Mr. Emmett's assistance) more convincing and at times more poetical than that of a fable by La Fontaine. The *Secrets of Nature* (now called *Secrets of Life*) films, from the first to the last, are still available to schools and

universities all over the world. So too are a number of strictly educational films of which *The Amæba* and the *Sea Horse* are probably the most famous. As Mary Field in another page of this issue points out, Bruce Woolfe's services to British Films are by no means confined to the *Secrets of Nature* series. For many years he was virtually the only pioneer, the sole patron, of a truly British film industry struggling slowly out of a cosmopolitan and by no means entirely honest tangle of fortune hunters, disappointed journalists, financial manipulators and the like. But the list of those who subscribed to a presentation salver given to him at a recent lunch shows that his work is not unhonoured by men of endeavour and intelligence. It might well be claimed that, on the merits of *Secrets of Life* alone (and particularly because of their immense prestige value abroad), a knighthood should be the least that the nation should bestow on him.

Mary Field

A CORRESPONDENT writes:—"It would be a pity if, amid the well-justified celebration of Bruce Woolfe's efforts, Mary Field's name were to be unmentioned. The directorial work, the scripting and editing, of the *Secrets of Life* films are almost entirely her work, and I would like at the least to pay a personal tribute to her skill and energies. I remember the first time I met her. I had been sent down to the Welwyn Studios to hunt up some material for a film on (I think) tea; and it was into her cutting room that I was ushered. I was the veriest tyro, and hardly knew how to work a rewinder, and I was terrified of this august and famous figure who presented me with a pile of tins alleged to contain the scenes I was seeking. Her abruptness, however, was only the abruptness of an efficient and busy woman, and she was kindness itself when I became entangled and lost in a maze of cut-outs. Since then, I have seen much of her from time to time in projects in which we were both concerned, whether they were film production or chilly week-ends at provincial film schools. She has always impressed me as having that rarity—a mind both academic and imaginative (do you remember *They Made the Land?*), and she undoubtedly works harder (and with better results) than any other woman I have met in some years of film-making. I am sure I am speaking for many others in saluting her skill, tenacity and enthusiasm."

George Pocknall

MANY IN THE film industry will be grieved to hear of the death of George Pocknall. He, in company with two other wardens, was killed instantly by a bomb while on patrol duty in the district in which he lived. He leaves a widow, three daughters and a son.

George Pocknall has been principal cameraman for G-B. Instructional since the formation of the Company, and was associated with Bruce Woolfe at Boreham Wood as far back as 1920. His loss will be badly felt, as in addition to being a first-class cameraman, he was an extremely efficient scientific instrument maker, and many were the improvements that were worked out by him to make the studio apparatus more efficient.

He served throughout the last war, which left his health somewhat undermined, but he stuck to his job in spite of his disability. He brought to his work a keenness and conscientiousness which, together with his loyalty, was a rare combination in these days.

His loss will be keenly felt by his colleagues who appreciated his many qualities and whose heartfelt sympathy will go out to his widow and family in their tragic loss.

New Ministry Appointment

ARTHUR ELTON is joining the Ministry of Information as Supervisor of Production and takes up his appointment on January 13th. The office is a new one and all sections of the film industry will be agreed on the desirability of having in an authoritative position in the Ministry someone who knows not only how films can be used for informational purposes, but knows also how films are made. Elton, who began his film

career in the script department of Gainsborough Pictures in 1927, under Michael Balcon, later worked for the same company on English versions of German features in Berlin. He was then trained in documentary production by John Grierson at the Empire Marketing Board Film Unit and during the past twelve years he has directed or produced films for the Post Office, the Ministry of Labour, the Gas Industry, the Oil Industry and a number of other interests. Since the formation of Film Centre which Elton helped to found, he has willingly borne the giant's share of the Centre's work, his best known contribution being his advisory services and production supervision to the Petroleum Films Bureau and the Shell Film Unit, which he has developed into the best technical film production organisation in the world. Elton has long been recognised in official and industrial circles as an expert formulator of film policies both in regard to production and distribution. He has lately been acting as associate producer for the Ministry of Information on a number of films for both theatrical and non-theatrical release. He represents shorts producers on the Films National Service Sub-committee which is advising the Ministry of Labour on deferment of military service, and lately has acted as Treasurer to the Association of Cine-Technicians. Elton has edited, or himself written, a number of successful books and pamphlets which present scientific and mechanical principles in simply intelligible terms and has recently been elected a member of the Royal Institution. His appointment to the Ministry represents a very serious loss to Film Centre and to Documentary News Letter which he helped to found, for his official position will not only make it necessary for him to sever his connection with these two activities, but may prevent him from continuing his invaluable contributions in many other film fields. We believe, however, that his decision to accept the appointment is a right one and has the support of his colleagues. It is hardly necessary to add that we wish him every success.

Training the Army

THE organisation already mentioned in D.N.L. December, responsible for the production of technical and training films, announces, in a Press hand-out, that 30 films are now in production. Most are in the hands of civilian film producing companies "so that the army training films will be of high technical quality and of maximum instructional value". What the hand-out does not mention is that most of the production companies are working to technically inadequate scripts, and are hampered at every turn by lack of understanding, and by forests of red tape to an extent which makes proper film production almost impossible.

Two News Letters

WE WELCOME to the ranks of film news-letters the first numbers of *N.Z. Film Letter* and *Documentary Film News*. The former is published by the Wellington Film Unit in New Zealand, under editor E. S. Andrews, the latter by the Association of Documentary Film Producers, Inc., New York, under editors Renee Gathman and Mary Losey.

"SECRETS" 1919-1940

By MARY FIELD, M.A.

IT IS TWENTY-ONE years since Bruce Woolfe made the first of the short nature films that, in the *Secrets of Nature* and *Secrets of Life* series have been appearing steadily in the cinemas of the world ever since. Considering the film business is now about forty-five years old, two contradictory views can be held about this twenty-one years' record; the first, one of surprise that there is no other such example of tenacity and continuity of purpose to be found in the film world, either here or abroad; the second, one of equal surprise that, in as brief a period as forty-five years, one type of picture can have persisted for twenty-one of them. Either way, the record provokes surprise and can hardly be due merely to chance or luck. Good reasons for the steady success of the "Secrets" must exist and can probably be deduced from internal evidence in the history of the films.

They had no planned beginning. During the Great War Bruce Woolfe was temporarily "lost" by the British Army and, until he was "found" again, put in a good deal of time at a soldiers' institute where he came across a copy of Gilbert White's "History of Selborne". He read it through two or three times. When the war was over and he came back to film-making at Boreham Wood, the country roads down which he walked every day—for Boreham Wood was real country then—looked different in the after-glow of Selborne. It was as though his eyes were gradually opening and he caught glimpses of a new and unguessed world about him. Animals, birds, insects, plants, the bushes in flower, the pond by the wayside, were no longer unidentified parts of the landscape but were exciting entities with a secret life of their own. He looked up books of natural history. He added to his essentially unscientific knowledge. An ordinary walk was now a rich and stimulating experience. It was an experience he wished to share. He determined to make some nature films.

His production company was British Instructional Films and it started its first "Secret" in 1919 with the life-story of the garden spider. It was made by Charles Head, of whom Bruce Woolfe had heard tell as a man who photographed insects. Edgar Chance, at that time, was thrilling the world of naturalists with his research work on the life history of the cuckoo. He agreed to collaborate on a film about the cuckoo. Bruce Woolfe himself, with an amateur collection of tanks in an old army hut, succeeded in recording the life-history of the caddis worm. The first three "Secrets" were made. But, as every one in the film business knows, it is one thing to make a film and another to find a distributor for it. All Wardour Street turned down the "Secrets" as the sort of thing the public don't want to see. The "Secrets" started their career as a flop and a flop they remained until, in 1922, New Era films was started to market another flop, Bruce Woolfe's *Armageddon*, the first of

all war films, which again the existing renters could not fancy. Under Gordon (now Sir Gordon) Craig the New Era company was started to distribute both unwanted features and unwanted shorts, and they were distributed to some purpose. But three shorts were not enough for a series; Craig needed six. Three more were hastily added from material that could be collected quickly, *Skilled Insect Artisans*, *Infant Welfare in the Bird World*, and the first Zoo secret, *Hands versus Feet*. So Set No. 1 was launched into the cinemas of Britain.

And were they the sort of thing the public didn't want to see? They were not. In their first year, 1922, five sets of "Secrets" were made and distributed—thirty reels in all. 1923 saw another thirty released. Faster than they could be made they could be marketed. Charles Head and Oliver Pike, who had both helped on the first series, worked against time to get the pictures out. So did everyone in British Instructional Films. So did everything to do with *Secrets of Nature*—except nature. That kept on at its accustomed pace. As a result few of these early films dealt with any story taking a longer period than four to six months to develop; there was no time then for long or complicated life histories.

Sixty nature films in two years temporarily glutted the market. No one at that time could believe in a continuous success for the series and, rightly enough, they had been determined to make the most of what they considered a temporary boom. So, 1924 saw only six "Secrets" produced and, in 1925, no new subjects were added to the series. This lull was partly due also to the fact that British Instructional had moved to a far larger studio at Surbiton, and other and larger production plans occupied the staff. For 1926 is a turning point in the history of the British film business and marks a change also in *Secrets of Nature*. So with the series of 1924, the first period of the "Secrets", comprising sixty-six subjects in all, may be said to be over.

These first sixty-six had been made with an old Prestwich camera, and later with a wooden Debie. Under Bruce Woolfe's unifying supervision, skilled naturalists, and camera men who hardly knew a sparrow from a chicken, had worked on the series. The pictures were edited in the style typical of the old "interest" films; one scene, one title, though one or two sequences, such as the fight between the scallop and the starfish, were well cut. To give variety they were printed on every kind of tinted stock imaginable, so that some reels looked like a roll of oddments from the ribbon counter. The old orthochromatic negative gave practically no sense of texture to the subjects; but every film was alive and vital, full of drama, was utterly unscientific, and each carried out the originator's aim—to interest people in the world of nature about them. In short they were grand entertainment.

1926 saw the beginnings of a British film revival. A scheme was put forward for men from the universities to become apprentices in the film business. Under this scheme Arthur Woods, Ralph Smart, Frank Wells, and Edward Baird came to British Instructional Films. In 1927 Anthony Asquith joined the company to make *Shooting Stars*, with J. O. C. Orton to help on scenario. Cedric Hardwicke worked at Surbiton to make his first film *Nelson*. Barkas brought back *Palaver* from West Africa. That strange and provocative film *Bolibar* was produced. It was in this period of creative activity that two recruits joined the British Instructional Films staff and became associated with the "Secrets"—Percy Smith and myself. Smith had already worked for years on microscopic and plant photography, but had never been able to market his remarkable productions. I knew nothing of films but came straight from London University with a first-class training in historical research which had taught me to present a reasoned and coherent story from a chaotic mass of material. Although quite ignorant of natural history, among other odd jobs I was allowed, in the true British Instructional Film tradition, to try my hand once at editing one of the 1926 "Secrets". I have been editing them ever since, in between every other kind of film production activity. I believe I still bring to the job my original abysmal ignorance and ingenuous curiosity.

So the twelve "Secrets" released in 1926 saw a development in editing and a different quality of photography, for Smith photographed what knowledge taught him must be there, and not what he happened to see. Under his influence the "Secrets" proved deeper and were more detailed than in the past. He contributed five of the 1926 "Secrets" including the *Life of a Plant* and his first mosquito film *The Gnat*. Among the other seven was Captain Gilbert's exquisite *Golden Eagle*.

The atmosphere of creative activity in the studios had its effect on the "Secrets". Now, as silent films approached their zenith, titles were eliminated until, as in *Berlin*, they finally vanished altogether. At this time the long explanatory titles disappeared from the "Secrets". They began to become films that told their own story in pictures. As a result they needed more careful planning and production. In 1927 twelve more appeared, of which Smith contributed seven. In 1928 came a second lull, similar to that of 1925. The twenty-four films released in less than two years had temporarily satisfied theatrical demand. Life histories were taking longer to plan and to produce. New editing demands often meant that two years had to be taken over a subject. And, in 1928, the Company was occupied in moving to the new studios at Welwyn.

At Welwyn British Instructional Films continued its pioneer way. There was collaboration with Svenska in the production of feature films. There was collaboration with German units both in feature productions at Welwyn, with German and British artists, and in India where British Instructional Films, U.F.A., and an Indian unit jointly produced the exquisite pictures *Shiraz* and *Throw of Dice*. Walter Summers returned from North Africa with the arresting silent version of *Patrol*. The distributing company Pro Patria had a monopoly for the distribution of Russian films in this country. In this international atmosphere six new "Secrets" appeared in 1929 of

which *Scarlet Runner and Co.* became a classic, while *Spring-time at the Zoo* was a pioneer editing job.

But all these activities were arrested by the appearance and instantaneous success of talking films. Probably no other production company in Britain was caught with so much big silent production on hand as British Instructional Films. There were some "Secrets" being made, but editing on them was immediately suspended.

Then, in 1930, Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford made the first talking Shakespearean film, *The Taming of the Shrew*. The press show was to be a great occasion, but, incredible as it seems now, there was no sound-short to run before it. Bruce Woolfe was appealed to. Could he let the organisers have a sound "Secret"? He could. So the film had to be made at top speed, with no tradition to go on, in editing or commentary, and no time to evolve theories. A commentator was discovered in Victor Peers, then on the production staff. The technical problems with a new and untried sound equipment involved working all night. William Hodgson, famous conductor of the Marble Arch Pavilion orchestra, wrestled with planning his music to fit the three hundred foot lengths that were all the laboratories could cope with. There were no moviolas or synchronisers for cutting, and judgment or lucky guesswork took their place. The result was the sweet-pea film *Peas and Cues* that stole the press show.

The "talking" Secrets enjoyed a boom. Twenty-four were distributed in the same year, 1930, twelve in 1931. But the complete disappearance of the sub-title made editing and continuity far more difficult than in silent versions, and the demands of the editor on Smith, Gilbert, Head, Pike and Higham became even more exacting. In the studios the standard of experiment in sound was high. Asquith tried out new theories in *Cottage on Dartmoor* and *Tell England*. Aafa Films brought their lovely film *Avalanche*, with its complicated German track, to have an English sound version made. Villiers brought back *Windjammer* from his voyage round the Horn. Walter Creighton, pacing up and down the studios, bent on big production, casually produced the exquisite *Southern April* whose sound track, eight years too early, did all *The River* ever aimed at, and more. Rotha came to try his hand at *Contact*. Legg and J. B. Holmes started their film work at Welwyn. No wonder the commentaries of the "Secrets" of this period contain every experiment in sound that could be devised, including one of the earliest and most complicated attempts at synchronised musical cutting in *Daily Dozen at the Zoo*, and blank verse in *Plants of the Underworld*.

By this time camera equipment for nature films had become more complicated. Newman-Sinclairs began to take the place of hand-turned cameras and the pace in using innumerable tripods, lenses and gadgets was set by Walter Higham, a wealthy amateur, whose photography certainly amply repaid the money he invested in equipment. Percy Smith alone continued to disregard equipment, and, given expensive new cameras, would gut them and, by adding a few pieces of meccano and oddments from Mrs. Smith's work basket, vastly improve their performance.

The upheavals of the film world broke up the old British Instructional Film group in 1933. The feature production staff

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were all immediately snapped up by other companies, where each one has made his mark. The shorts production staff were offered support as a separate entity by Isidore Ostrer, and so Gaumont British Instructional came into being. The title *Secrets of Nature*, being the copyright of British Instructional Films, the nature films of the new company were entitled *Secrets of Life*, but this latter and correct name seems rarely used.

Gaumont British Instructional was formed primarily to produce instructional films, and theatrical productions such as the "Secrets" were a deviation from the Company's general rule. There now developed a new and scientific series of nature films known as the G.B.I. biology series which are often confused with the "Secrets". These biology films are highly scientific instructional films produced under the direction of Professor Salisbury, Dr. Julian Huxley, Mr. Hewer and other masters of their subject. Though photographed by the same photographers as the "Secrets", they have been edited by J. V. Durden, and very little material is interchanged between the two series. Yet the two kinds of film are badly mixed in people's minds since both are loosely called G.B.I. nature films; and this leads to much unfounded criticism such as that *Fasciola* has no entertainment value or that *The Tough 'Un* is too frivolous for instruction.

Higham and Gilbert gave up nature cinematography. Charles Head died in 1938. The gaps they left were substituted by Goodliffe and Durden, each with a definite contribution to make. Hodgson continued to supervise the music of the "Secrets", most of which has recently been composed by Jack Beaver. Various commentators were tried after Victor Peers was no longer with the unit, but no one was used exclusively. In 1937 Gaumont British suggested their news-commentator Emmett might be tried as commentator. His first efforts, he himself readily agrees, were completely foreign to the pictures, but gradually, as he was drawn into the production group, his style of commentating the "Secrets" changed, until now only a prejudiced listener can deny that his commentaries to such films as *Shadow in the Stream*, *Babes in the Wood*, and *The*

Tough 'Un are brilliant examples of commentaries that are an integral part of the picture. Disbelievers should see the slight divergences between the commentary as written for "E.V.H." and the commentary as he records it. The "Secrets" always have been popular entertainment, conforming closely to theatrical demands, shortening when *Silly Symphonies* set the length of "shorts" at about five hundred feet, lengthening to a full thousand when longer films were needed, quickening the tempo as feature films quickened, talking when talking films were demanded, and in 1939 bursting into Dufaycolor when there seemed to be a demand for coloured films. As colour is expensive and earns no more than black and white, the "Secrets" very practically are reverting to black and white. Six new films are now in preparation, photographed by Smith, Pike and Durden, as Goodliffe is too busy to participate this year. War or no war, film crisis or no film crisis the "Secrets" go on.

Now why? Partly because, supervised by Bruce Woolfe, they are always good, well-made jobs, with nothing skimmed, nothing done carelessly. Partly because their production is amazingly elastic, new personalities and new ideas being welcomed, so that the films are seldom repetitive or reminiscent of past work, either in subject, design or technique. Partly because, except for three years, 1934-1937, they have always been produced in the midst of active theatrical film production and conform closely to current theatrical requirements, which conformity again prevents rigidity of form. Partly because, although correct in detail, they are not made by experts or scientists, but by ordinary people for ordinary people and are therefore not dull, opinionated, high-brow or condescending. The "Secrets" always pre-suppose an unwilling audience that has to be coaxed and lured into opening its eyes to what is going on in the world apart from the cinema, the works, the shops, the home. They are made with enjoyment for people to enjoy unquestioningly, as Bruce Woolfe once enjoyed Selborne. That enjoyment, that is to be shared by producers and audience, appears to be the secret of the "Secrets".

SECRETS OF LIFE

A List of the films produced in this Series since the publication of *Secrets of Nature*, by Mary Field and Percy Smith (Faber and Faber, 1934.)

† Titles in italics indicate non-theatrical versions.

* The 1939 series are in colour.

1934	Thistledown <i>Thistle†</i>	Home from the South <i>Warblers</i>	Mixed Bathing <i>Washing Time at the Zoo</i>
	Lupins <i>Life Cycle of a Plant</i>	We are Seven <i>Great Tits</i>	Hedgerows <i>Life in the Hedgerows</i>
	Queer Diet <i>How Plants Feed</i>	Living Lies <i>Looper Caterpillars</i>	He Would a Wooing Go <i>The Frog</i>
	Baby on the Rocks <i>Buzzard</i>	Wake Up and Feed <i>Feeding Time at the Zoo</i>	Butterflies and Nettles <i>Tortoiseshell Butterfly</i>

SECRETS OF LIFE (continued)

1935

New Generation
Seed Production

Safety First
Self Defence by Plants

Fish Face
Facts about Fish

Life in the Balance
Interdependence of Pond Life

Ravenous Roger
Roger the Raven

Home in the Valley
Sparrow Hawk

1936

London Visitors
Blackheaded Gull

Tawny Owl
Story of Tawny Owl

Sawfly
Life Cycle of Sawfly

Rock Pools
Life on a Rocky Shore

Ebb Tide
Marine Sand Animals

Community Life
Wood Ants

1937 Home Life in the Marshes
Island and Shore Builders

Catch of the Season
Development of the Trout

See How they Run
Animal Movements

Perky Cockney
London Sparrow

Over and Under
(Theatrical Version only)

Home in the Heather
Emperor Moth

1938

Swan Song
The Swan

Living in London
London Pigeon

The Tough 'Un
The Dandelion

Three Wicked Sisters
(Theatrical Version only)

Kings in Exile
King Penguins

Far and Wide
Seed Dispersal by Wind
Seed Dispersal by Burial
Seed Dispersal by Animals
Seed Dispersal by Fruit exploding

1939* Father of the Family
(Theatrical Version only)

Old Blue
(Theatrical Version only)

Ducks and Drakes
(Theatrical Version only)

Water Baby
(Theatrical Version only)

Two Little Orphans
(Theatrical Version only)

Housepainter
(Theatrical Version only)

OPEN LETTER

TO ALL

FILM INTERESTS

WORLD'S PRESS NEWS announces the introduction of a regular fortnightly column devoted to Documentary Films and the use of the Silver Screen as an advertising and publicity medium by the Government and by Big Business.

This column is written by an expert; crisply, authoritatively, knowledgeably. You will be interested in his views and comments.

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FILMS OF THE MONTH

THE GREAT DICTATOR

It is probable that if British military experts had had the choice of fifty old destroyers or the new Chaplin film as America's initial contribution to the war effort, they would still have chosen the destroyers. Which is a sad commentary on the military mind, but an unconscious tribute to Chaplin.

The Great Dictator is just about the only good thing that has come out of this war so far. It may be some time before its qualities can be finally and exactly assessed, but in the opinion of this reviewer Chaplin has achieved a triumphant *tour-de-force* that will play a not inconsiderable part in shaping the ideas of millions who to-day are groping their way towards the better world.

It is this message of hope for the future that comes out so much more strongly in *The Great Dictator* than in any previous Chaplin picture. Some critics have complained about Charlie's speech in the last sequence, his impassioned oration to the people of the world to unite. But it is precisely this speech which marks Chaplin's tremendous stride forward over all his previous films. In the past he has been content to indicate a vague, diffused better land where little tramps will not be kicked around by cops and bullies. In *The Great Dictator* he summons us to action—he calls on us to fight for that better world with every strength of our being. His call has nothing to do with phony patriotisms or with one group of nations against another. It is a call to the people everywhere—"Jews, Gentiles, Black men and White men"—and the future generation, if not this generation, will applaud his courage. For not one out of a hundred of our contemporary intellectuals has had the guts to do the same.

Mark this point carefully—*The Great Dictator* is something far more than a satire on Hitler and Mussolini. It is a protest and a call to action against all the bullies and tyrants of this world, and we will do well to remember that some of them are a great deal nearer home than Germany and Italy.

Millions of oppressed people will have cause to thank Chaplin for this film—and not least the Jews. Chaplin himself is not, I believe, a Jew but he has no illusions about the causes of anti-Semitism. He knows that the Jews in Germany and elsewhere are persecuted, and racial prejudice inflamed, as a deliberate policy of rulers to distract the attention of the people from their real grievances. And he is not afraid to say so, and to say it so forcefully that only a scoundrel or a cretin could fail to grasp the truth of it. And that took courage too.

Chaplin makes of Hitler a pathetically futile figure who wants so much to believe that he is the ordained Lord of the Universe and strives so desperately to live up to the rôle. His life is one long frustration. When he wants to invade Austria he finds that Mussolini is one jump ahead. So Mussolini is invited to Berlin and

everything is staged to give him an inferiority complex. It is in this sequence that Jack Oakie gives the performance of his life. He plays Mussolini as a titanic, jovial bluffer who reduces Hitler to a state of hysterical despair. It is doubtful if there has ever been a more brilliantly inspired comedy sequence than the interview between the two dictators and the subsequent custard-pie tornado.

Henry Daniell contributes enormously to these sequences in the rôle of a combined Goebbels and Ribbentrop. He turns in a masterly performance, satanic and cynical, conveying with every gesture the consciousness of his own importance. Whereas Billy Gilbert's Goering is mostly just a buffoon, Daniell is all the time the sinister influence behind the scenes.

All this time Chaplin, in his other rôle as the little Jewish barber, has been eking out a painful existence in the Ghetto, constantly at the mercy of storm-troopers waging incessant pogroms. Because he insists on fighting back when persecuted he wins the love of Paulette Goddard who spends much of her time hitting the chief storm-trooper (Eddie Gribbon) over the head with a frying-pan. Between dodging storm-troopers he shaves petrified customers to the rhythm of a Brahms Rhapsody.

Always he is the symbol of ordinary decent humanity wanting only to live in peace and friendliness with their neighbours. Eventually he is put into a concentration camp. From this he escapes only to be mistaken for the Führer himself. And the Führer is mistaken for the escaping prisoner, beaten up and lugged off to the concentration camp. So the Jewish barber unwittingly gives the order to invade Austria, and then learns that he must speak in the rôle of Führer to a crowd of millions waiting to acclaim him.

It is now that Chaplin speaks for himself, and it would be grudging for anyone to complain that by doing so he steps out of character. The oration is delivered with an eloquence and a sincerity that will hold any audience spellbound. It is the voice of the people—not the voice of the nauseating little man of the Strube cartoons—but the voice of the people to whom the future belongs.

The function of film is to inspire men as well as to entertain them: Chaplin deserves the gratitude of us all.

OUR TOWN

HOLLYWOOD has made some strange films in its time—but none stranger than *Our Town*. Disregarding the convention that nothing should be done to make the audience conscious of the screen—disregarding the formula for box office that you should only give people what they are accustomed to, Sol Lesser, producer of *Rainbow on the River* . . .

and Sam Wood, director of *Marx Brothers* and *Mr. Chips*, have plunged into the wide open spaces.

They have borrowed liberally from documentary technique—they have a commentator who appears on the screen—they have direct interviews with the townspeople. At times you could almost imagine you were watching *Housing Problems* or *Front Line*, except the actors of *Our Town* are not as good or true as Mrs. Arkwright or the Mayor of Dover. And finally the whole film is about people and how they live. It is a pity they chose the newspaper editor's and the doctor's families as the main characters and not the common people who make up a small town, but it can't be helped. I find the story they tell and the way they tell it, one of the most pleasant films I have seen for a long time.

But for some reason the film has a vague dishonesty. I don't know what it is—but it is there. Whether it is that the film deals with only one side of people's lives—with only a little of the life that goes on in and around the two houses—and disregards most of the important things—I don't know, but it does ring with a faint dishonesty. At the same time you get a feeling of uplift. I have never felt it before, and I certainly didn't expect to feel it through a film, but when the girl is going through her past life, I suddenly felt "Hallelujah, up with the good life—Hallelujah, blessed are the humble, meek and mild—the pure—those that mourn—Hallelujah, blessed are those that steal—those that are taken in adultery—that covet their neighbour's ass and his ox, and anything that is their neighbour's". It is a peculiar film.

There are a lot of pleasant sequences and people. The milkman is a charming old soul and he is about the best observed character in the film. His old-fashioned milk pail with the measure in the lid—and the fact that he never keeps books but keeps his accounts in his head. The town organist and drunkard is a bit unreal—morose drunks that drink alone and insult everyone are about as rare as eggs. Drinking seldom takes people outside a society—it usually brings them in, but I don't know American small towns—it might be true. I have even heard rumours that Americans spend their evenings sitting in soda fountains.

There is a very fine sequence in which Thomas Mitchell gives his son a talking to. Some people may not like it, but I found it very true to life—father giving his grown son a talking to—very difficult—if he is too tough his son may say go and chase yourself—his son is pretty big and tough—so he gives him the old sob stuff—which practically every young man has had done on him by father, mother or some elder person, and the result seems usually to be the same—the young man knows that it is all stupid but bursts into tears.

It is a peculiar film but a good one. The play finished with the girl dying—the film makes one concession to box office—she doesn't die but it doesn't matter, the film gets over its story that life is pleasant. The girl had nearly to die to get a full understanding of the values of ordinary things round her. It's something the same during a war.

DOCUMENTARY BOOKINGS FOR JANUARY 1941

(The following bookings are selected from a list covering its Members, supplied by The News and Specialised Theatres Association)

	Week ending		Week ending		Week ending
A Dog is Born The News House, Nottingham	25th	Egypt Eternal Tatler Theatre, Manchester	18th	March of Time, 6th Year, No. 7 News Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne Tatler Theatre, Manchester	11th
A Haunting We will Go Tatler Newsreel Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	25th	Every Eve News Theatre, Leeds	25th	March of Time, on Foreign News Fronts News Theatre, Nottingham	18th
A Kick in Time Tatler Newsreel Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	18th	Ferdinand the Bull Tatler News Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	4th	Medical Miracles News Theatre, Leeds Tatler Theatre, Manchester	11th
A Road in India Tatler Newsreel Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	11th	Fishing in Hawaii Tatler Newsreel Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	18th	Paramount Pictorial News House, Nottingham	4th
Atlantic Patrol News Theatre, Leeds	4th	Four Thousand Years (Travel Interest) News Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne The Tatler Theatre, Chester	18th	Playmates from Wild News House, Nottingham	18th
At the Circus The News House, Nottingham	4th	Glances of Australia Tatler Newsreel Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	25th	Point of View No. 8 News Theatre, Leeds	25th
Beat of the Drums The News Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	25th	Going Places No. 78 Tatler Newsreel Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	4th	Pow-Wow News Theatre, Nottingham	18th
Beautiful Switzerland News Theatre, Nottingham	11th	Going Places No. 79 Tatler Newsreel Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	18th	Reporter Investigates Liberty The News House, Nottingham	11th
Bonnie Scotland The Tatler Theatre, Leeds	4th	Goldilocks and the Three Bears Tatler Newsreel Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	18th	Road in India News Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	11th
Bringing it Home The News House, Nottingham	25th	Home Movies (Benchley) Tatler Newsreel Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	11th	Sailors without Uniform News Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	25th
Carry on, Children News Theatre, Leeds News Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	4th	Ice Cutters Tatler Newsreel Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	25th	Screen Snapshots No. 85 Tatler News Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	25th
Catching Whoppers News House, Nottingham	11th	Java Journey The News Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	4th	See Your Doctor (R. Benchley Comedy) Tatler Theatre, Chester Tatler Theatre, Manchester	11th
Crime and Punishment The Tatler Theatre, Leeds	11th	Keyboard News Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	11th	Ships that Pass News Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	18th
Danger Coast of Britain News Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne News Theatre, Leeds Tatler Theatre, Manchester	4th	Land of Alaska Nellie Tatler Newsreel, Newcastle	18th	Silent Wings News Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	4th
Donald's Cousin Gil News Theatre, Newcastle	18th	Madeira, Isle of Romance Tatler Newsreel Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	4th	Sink or Swim News Theatre, Leeds News Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	11th
Donald's Lucky Day Tatler Newsreel Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	25th	Man Made Island The News House, Nottingham	25th		4th
Donald's Ostrich News Theatre, Newcastle-on-Tyne	25th				

Further Appreciation of our feature on Documentary Films appearing in the "KINEMATOGRAPH WEEKLY" The Leading Journal of the Film Industry

Ministry of Information,
Malet Street, London, W.C.1
Empire Division

DEAR SIR,

I have found this very interesting, and I am sure it will serve a valuable purpose. I believe there is a growing and important field for documentary films in the overseas Empire.

Yours faithfully,

H. V. HODSON.

Ministry of Food,
Neville House,
Page Street, S.W.1

DEAR SIR,

Thank you for the copy of your special supplement dealing with the preparation and exhibition of propaganda and documentary films.

I should be very glad to receive a regular copy of your supplement for my own information.

Yours faithfully,

A. D. PETERS.

Lensbury Club,
Broom Road,
Teddington

DEAR MR RAYMENT,

I am very glad to hear that you propose making a monthly feature of the supplement, and I wish you every success with it.

Yours sincerely,

A. WOLKOFF,
Asiatic Petroleum Company

Published
every
Thursday

Kinematograph
WEEKLY

85 Long Acre
London, WC2

NEW DOCUMENTARY FILMS

We've Got to Get Rid of the Rats. *Production:* Strand for M.O.I. *Direction:* James Carr. *Distribution:* Theatrical. 5 minutes.

THE MEMORY of my acute dislike of the Pied Piper persists to this day and I now perceive that it was due less to his callous treatment of human beings than to the cruel deceit which he practised upon the rats. For this film shows that the rat-catcher need not be an inhuman monster. The campaigns of the Dalton family against rats date from 1710 and compared with the massacres for which they have been responsible the single *tour de force* of the Pied Piper ranks only as a street skirmish. Yet after seeing Jimmy Carr's *We've Got to Get Rid of the Rats* my affection for the Daltons soars as high as my contempt for the Hamelin kerb musician remains low. The reason is that the Daltons clearly feel a proper respect for the rat, a respect not unmixed with sympathetic affection.

As Bill Dalton harangues us from the screen like a drill sergeant faced with a particularly sorry bunch of recruits, it is apparent that he does not fancy our chances in the war with the rats. He knows rats. In fact he prefers them to us. And why not? There they are, intelligent, precise, and pursuing with a fastidious grace the maraudings which illustrate Bill's commentary. And there are we, shivering and shuddering with horror in our seats at the mere image of enemy activity. Yet Bills tells us all he knows about killing rats. He gives us the full benefit of thirty years' experience of his own and of generations of Daltons before him in pitting the wits of man against the wits of the rat. Bill is a cockney with a sense of humour and fairplay who doesn't care a damn for anyone (or for cameras and microphones), and he thinks that if the rats can continue, in spite of all our efforts, to destroy our national wealth to their own tune of millions of pounds a year, well then they deserve to stay on their expensive mixed diet, and good luck to 'em. For Bill has had a lot of good times with rats.

Coal Front. *Production:* G.B.I. for the M.O.I. *Direction:* Francis Searle. *Distribution:* M.O.I. Non-T. 10 minutes.

Coal Front is a simple instructional film on mining, made mostly from bits of other films, plain commentary and no music or natural sound. An attempt has been made to give it a wartime reference by stuff in the commentary about exports, credits and the value of coal to industry, but in the main it is simply expository. On these lines it is quite successful, but surely there was a much better film here to be made. The purely technical aspects of mining are all very well, but the real story lies in the miner and his life. And, on the technical side, only one way of working a mine is shown: some indication should have been given that this is only one of several methods. Mechanical cutters are far from popular with miners owing to

their noise, masking the usual pit danger signals—creaking of pitprops and so on. And if a great point is going to be made of the fact that miners have their own checkweighman to watch their interests, the most elementary justice would insist that it be pointed out that they pay him themselves.

Ulster. *Production:* Strand Films. *Producer:* Alex Shaw. *Director:* Ralph Keene. *Camera:* Jo Jago and George Noble. *Commentary* written by St. John Ervine and spoken by Robert MacDermott. *Music:* Richard Addinsell. 2 reels. *Distribution:* T. and Non.-T. 20 minutes.

MATERIAL of a really well-shot travelogue about Ulster in wartime has been made, by ingenious and imaginative use of scissors and sound, into a warm and sympathetic documentary. Addinsell's musical score adds much to the film, with its haunting melody sung by a female voice, and appearing again and again in conjunction with visuals of the continuing and basic process of the tilling of the soil. There are some very lovely shots of the linen mills and, as usual (and, one supposes, inevitably), some very boring shots of troops marching. Robert MacDermott's Ulster accent adds an air of great authenticity to a rather routine commentary by St. John Ervine.

Man or Machine? (Point of View No. 9.) *Production:* Spectator. 19 minutes.

Man or Machine? is quite easily the best Point of View we've had so far. The theme is mass-production, and for once in this series we do get a sight of the real arguments in the case, and are not fobbed off with the usual evasions. The two sides are, on the whole, quite fairly presented. First, craftsmanship, its products expressions of a man's skill, the work a real satisfaction for the craftsman. Second, mass-production with its widespread provision of cheap goods for everyone, more leisure for the workers, but a stultifying and monotonous routine in its factory principles.

And, thank heavens, it's all new shooting, and very well done at that, no library stuff at all that I could see.

The trouble is that a short film of this sort does not get down to the basic argument underlying all the rest, which is quite simply that mass-production, that is, communal production, calls for communal consumption. That is the real problem. We all know really that there can be no going back to the old individual craftsmanship: mass production, like it or not, is here to stay. But it calls for a clear orientation of thought, the need for which is brought out very well by the interview with the two girls working in a mass production factory. One says she hates the job as it's all routine. You don't have to think! At once we sympathise with her, a frustrated individual. The other says she likes the job as it's all routine, you don't have to think, and can talk or

sing with the other girls; and once again we sympathise, knowing that her relations with the other girls is something much more important than the individual frustration in her job. We know that in the future no one will be able to obtain individual satisfaction and happiness apart from the community. In other words the significance of mass production is not the multiplication of cheap goods in Woolworths for personal use only, compared with the craftsmanship the rich can buy for their personal use, at their own exclusive shops; it is the fact that communal production has made available to everybody, where they behave as a community, far greater comfort and happiness than any rich man can hope to buy for himself. For instance, many people would find it far more pleasant to go to a cinema or football match than to sit in their own mansion and have a string quartet play to them alone.

The point *Man or Machine?* misses is that all that society, as we know it, can offer is the old liberal-individualist "more leisure."

War and Order. *Production:* G.P.O. for M.O.I. *Direction:* Charles Hasse. *Distribution:* M.O.I. Non-T. 10 minutes.

A NICE simple film—its theme is the police in war. The story is carried very clearly by commentary and sync. sequences which flow nicely into one another until the climax—an air-raid—is reached. Then you get a surprising picture of what the police do. They give the word to sound the warning—they report bomb damage—patrol the damaged buildings—co-ordinate other services and see that nothing is left undone. There are some very nice characters—an amazing man drilling a squad of specials strengthened by most of the staff of the G.P.O. Film Unit.

The poor old cops certainly have a bad time these days, and although they have never been fully appreciated by some members of the community, I am sure that today even the most argumentative drunk will, when he wakes up safe and sound in a cell, be nothing but grateful for having been pulled in out of the shrapnel and bombs. Even the most foolhardy dope who tries to slip under the cord to take a short cut past a dangerous building should be thankful for the copper who has to walk under crumbling masonry to keep him back. Maybe the song is wrong—it looks as if you can "trust a special like an old-time cop".

War and Order is a good film but it is a pity that it doesn't play up the heroic a little more—it presents the cops "special and old time" as somewhat inhuman. (I hold no briefs for policemen normally, and my maternal grandfather threw my father out of the house the first time he saw him because he thought he was a policeman). At the moment, the police are doing a terrific job and they get very little credit.

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AN APPRECIATION OF FRANK PERCY SMITH

By GRAHAME THARP

- 1908
22.5 Received machine, accessories and 2 rolls negative film (165 ft. each).
30.5 Dragon-fly and sporassus—against dark ground. 5.30 p.m. in sunlight. F6.3 Under exposed (165 ft.).
31.5 Wood Ant fighting and Ants milking Aphides. (165 ft.). 12 o/c. sunlight. White background. Full exposure.

THESE FEW SENTENCES record the first subjects ever filmed by Percy Smith. They are taken from his diary, which, with characteristic lack of self-interest, he threw away many years ago. Mrs. Smith was lucky enough to find it before the dustman, and so the details of the first years' work of one of the best known of contemporary film makers is preserved intact. A third of the number of pages are neatly filled in, but, about 1910, the entries finish. Mr. Smith said simply that he became too busy then to keep a diary. It is only necessary to look at the list of films which he has made between 1908 and 1940, some 206 in all, to realise just how busy Mr. Smith has been; for he does all the work himself. He collects the specimens, builds the intricate apparatus for stop-motion photographing, and spends patient hours filming the only too often recalcitrant object. After the first few weeks, he also developed every inch of negative himself. One developing-tank, 2 ft. square, has seen over a quarter of a million feet in the last 34 years.

Throughout his whole life, Percy Smith has made ingenious apparatus from the most unlikely material in order to follow his interests. During his schooldays he collected insects of all sorts, especially, as he says, live ones. In need of a microscope, he made an instrument from a garden syringe, and some telescope lenses, and was more surprised than anyone when it worked.

It is fortunate for science and film that Mr. Smith found himself working as a clerk at the Board of Education, with whom he stayed for some fourteen years filling in forms; because, during these years, he found it essential to apply his mind to something alive to counteract the dead-weight of life in this particular Government department. It was natural that he should turn to his old hobby—the microscope.

He spent his leave, and extra leave when he could wangle it, in field-days. He became a member of many scientific societies and contributed articles to various scientific journals. As a result of this work he was asked to lecture all over the country.

Government work left him plenty of spare time, but not much spare cash. This decided him to attempt to make his own lantern slides. The

first camera he ever used was a flower-pot, with a pill-box (with a pin-hole in it) fitted to the hole in the smaller end of the pot. He held a photographic plate at the open end and wrapped it up in dusters. With this unpromising device Mr. Smith photographed his wife's mother at the end of the garden. The photograph was surprisingly good and they were all very pleased with it.

The weird contraptions Mr. Smith evolved from time to time to make his lantern slides did produce unexpectedly good results. In fact, they were so vivid and unusual that this work of his became well-known. He became, too, honorary editor of a leading scientific journal.

It was his scientific work that finally brought Percy Smith into contact with film-making. He recognised something of the possibilities of cinema when he saw his first film, a scenic tour, at a once-famous hall in the Strand known as *Hayle's Train Tours*. The inside of the cinema was made up as a railway carriage and the films shown were what one might have seen from the windows of a train. To make the effect realistic, the seats were joggled about.

At that time, 1908, Charles Urban was handling Martin Duncan's series of zoological films. At one of the press shows launching them—old-fashioned affairs of cigars and overlaid tables—Percy Smith was introduced to Urban, who had seen some of his lantern slides. He agreed to try his hand at making scientific films in his spare time.

On the 22nd May, 1908, Urban handed Percy Smith his first film camera and some negative to make a few tests. The camera bore marks of the Russo-Japanese war for it had been used to film the fall of Port Arthur. This camera is running sturdily even to this day, and is a fairly silent witness to Percy Smith's genius with equipment.

Eight days later at Bexhill, he filmed a dragon-fly on a twig. The next day he found, and shot with some difficulty because of an unadaptable tripod, wood ants fighting. He was lucky enough, too, to find some Ants milking Aphids. He took these historic scenes to the laboratory for processing, although he was not very sanguine of the result.

Afterwards, in the Theatre, he told Charles Urban what he was about to see. Urban said, "Go on, ants don't milk aphids!" However, when he saw that they did, he was intensely interested and immediately went into the question of better equipment.

With this new equipment Mr. Smith set-to in his spare time, for he was still at the Board of Education. He made 13 zoological and trick

films for the Charles Urban Trading Company. He tried to interest the Board of Education in the use of films, but failed miserably. He did manage to pin down some Board of Education experts to a film show; but they would make no official announcement nor give any encouragement. Unofficially, their main criticism was that the absence of any examples of the most important subject of all—Botany—crippled the possibility of using films in education.

As a result of this discussion, Mr. Smith turned seriously towards the question of botanical subjects and, at the end of 1909, he left the Charles Urban Trading Company to work for Kineto Limited—still under the ægis of Charles Urban. A month afterwards, he built his first machine for filming plant life. This machine was driven by dripping water, for Mr. Smith has always believed in making his apparatus work itself as much as possible.

It was January when the machine was finished, and the only plant he could get hold of was an oversized hyacinth from a local florist. Lighting in those days was a problem, too, but Mr. Smith solved it, in the absence of gas or electricity, by using wicks floating in small tins of paraffin. He arranged some eight of these to light the plant; and, to keep the light even, he trimmed the wicks alternately: first, 1. 3. 5. 7 and then, 2. 4. 6. 8.

Percy Smith has made use of some queer channels of enquiry in the cause of micro-cinematography, but perhaps none quite so unlikely at first sight as his search for suitable light-sources. He found candle-light good, but ordinary candles were not good enough. Imaginatively, he took his candle problem to the local Roman Catholic Church. He expected to be kicked out, but the priest gladly gave him all the information he wanted: almost, I believe, adding a benediction.

The most interesting part of Mr. Smith's candle experiments was his solution of the problem of keeping the candle-flame at the same height, in relation to the object, as the candle burned down. He succeeded in doing this by fixing the candles to the tray of an old letter-weighing machine. As the candles burnt they became lighter, and the tray gradually rose to its normal position, thus pushing them up! The calculation of the loss of weight of the candle and its consequent rate of rise is one of those niceties which one associates with Mr. Smith.

By the end of April, 1910, Percy Smith finished two films of plant life, *Birth of a Flower* and *Germination of Plants*. Charles Urban held up the distribution of these films so that a new colour process, Kinemacolor, which was then being developed, could be used. In fact, it was not until nearly a year later that the first one, *Birth of a Flower*, was shown. This film was immediately successful, being hailed as a great achievement by the press and the public. So much so, indeed, that the manager of the Electric Palace in Lewisham wrote this paragraph in a letter to the distributors:

"This film has been received with more applause than any other film since I have had the management of the above theatre. A thing I think unprecedented in picture theatres is the

calling for an encore, which took place both last night and tonight."

So the film was re-wound and projected a second time each night.

Soon after he completed *Birth of a Flower*, Percy Smith started work with Kinemacolor in colour screens for plant subjects for use with incandescent gas. This, and his work for Kineto Limited, kept him so busy that at the end of 1910 he left the Board of Education and became a professional film producer of nature subjects in black and white and colour. By the beginning of the first world war he had made 54 films. The first war upset the production of scientific films and Percy Smith started to make a fortnightly War Map for Kineto. He did, as well, a great deal of model, cartoon, and map work for the Army and Navy; and, towards the end of the first year, he made several trick advertisement films, called *Kino Ads*, for firms like Bryant & May and Waterman Pens. For the last three years of the war, he was attached to the Naval Air Service, for which he filmed all kinds of naval activities and early aircraft-carrier experiments. In the course of this work he and his camera often had the hair-raising experience of being the only objects above the level of the deck, when it had been cleared for landing planes. Perhaps the job he remembers best from the war years was the filming from an airship of the surrender of the German Fleet.

Charles Urban had re-formed Kineto Limited in America and, after the war, Percy Smith rejoined the firm in England to take part in an advanced educational scheme. Some of the titles of the 56 films he made in this series will give an idea of the ground he covered:—

The Starling
Butterflies and Moths
Beetle Studies
Spider Studies
Science of a Soap Bubble
Science at home I-VII (Magnet, Sound-waves, Atmosphere, Quicksilver, etc.)
The Induction Coil
The Story of Sulphur
Life Functions I-VI (Amaba, Vorticella, Hydra, Frog, Grasshopper, Worm).

But this programme did not get the support it deserved; the film faded out in 1923, and Percy Smith broke his association with Charles Urban.

So, for the next two years, he "marked time", as he puts it, by making a series of insect cartoons called *Archie the Ant*. These cartoons have been presented to the British Film Institute.

In 1925, Percy Smith joined Bruce Woolfe at British Instructional Films Ltd., and started an association which has already lasted longer than his earlier one with Charles Urban.

Bruce Woolfe had already produced several *Secrets of Nature* films at the early headquarters of B.I.F.—the "Army Hut" at Elstree—before he met Percy Smith. He continued to produce this series, to which Percy Smith contributed 34 films, including such well-known titles as *Battle of the Plants*, *The Frog*, *Woodwasp and its parasites*, *The Dodder*, and *The Changing Year*.

When Bruce Woolfe left British Instructional

Films in 1933, Percy Smith went with him to continue making this series of films with Gaumont British Instructional Ltd., under the new title *Secrets of Life*. Quite recently Percy Smith made two of these films in colour, this time Dufaycolour; they are *Lupin* and the *Newt*. In these last seven years he has some 33 *Secrets of Life* standing to his credit.

There are few people in this country who have not seen a *Secrets of Nature* or a *Secrets of Life* and marvelled at the processes of living so miraculously unfolded. And, if they could visit Percy Smith's house in Southgate, they would marvel, too, at the perseverance and ingenuity of the man who has spent most of his life recording and interpreting nature.

It is an experience to visit him there; to spend a few hours listening to him talking of his work and to be shown the fascinating machinery he has evolved to simplify it. He has no secret about his methods. Indeed, I believe that if one were to set up as a micro-cinematographer next door, he would be round the same day, lending his knowledge to help one over the many stiles he climbed himself years ago.

The house in which he works is crammed from basement to top floor with every conceivable device for filming animals, vegetables and minerals. All his cameras are very early models, for they seemed to have formed a habit of lasting a long time in his hands.

If Mr. Smith wants some gadget, he makes it in his workshop in the basement. One week-end he was badly in need of a gear wheel and all the shops were closed, so he cut teeth in a halfpenny and used that.

Mr. Smith takes a delight in working his apparatus. He switches on the current and, if it be a plant machine, after some whirrings and clicks, the daylight shutters close, the lamps light up, the camera turns to expose one frame, the lamps go out, and the daylight shutters open again. All this can be arranged to work once a minute, or once a week, by replacing one simple timing-wheel with another. If you look closely at the stop-motion mechanism, you will recognise everyday things put to unfamiliar uses. The inside of a cuckoo clock works contentedly beside a clockwork motor.

By the time you have reached the microscopic camera upstairs, you will realise with a start that it is a good half-hour since Mrs. Smith came over from the house at the end of the garden to say that lunch had already been waiting twenty minutes. Mr. Smith remembers it himself and you both go over with rather a guilty feeling.

A few weeks ago, Percy Smith was doing some specialist filming of mosquito life-history for the Shell unit. He almost despaired of being able to photograph the mosquito adult emerging from the pupa. The pupæ would not do their stuff; either they died, or they waited until his back was turned. One night, however, he was sitting up watching a likely-looking pupa when bombs began to fall in his road. Just then the adult started to emerge. Who cares for a bomb or two at such a time? Percy Smith filmed the whole process, which took over an hour. It is one of the most beautiful shots that I have seen.

MASS OBSERVERS

By EWART HODGSON, film critic of the *News of the World*

A comment on Tom Harrison's article on "Social Research and the Film". (D.N.L. XI)

MR. HARRISSON's first complaint is that the Films Division has "no adequate machinery to provide it with evidence, etc., of the influence of its films"; and he goes on to say, "it is not worth while elaborating the difficulties which would face any cinema manager who, while carrying on his ordinary jobs, attempts without training, to observe reactions to specific points including the sequences of short films sandwiched in full-length programmes".

This statement suggests that Mr. Harrison is none too well informed of what the "ordinary jobs" of a cinema manager consist. The observation of audience reaction to every part of his programme comes well within the scope of a good manager. Now why should Mr. Harrison think Mass Observers are better trained and experienced in this specific form of observation than a good manager?

To be assured that Mass Observation is of any value at all, there are three questions which need to be answered. Perhaps Mr. Harrison will oblige:

- (1) What is the method of selection and of training a Mass Observer?
- (2) How, and through what body scientifically concerned with psychology, do they qualify for their jobs of accurately observing and recording public opinion and behaviour?
- (3) What are Mr. Harrison's own qualifications for the publishing of generalisations arrived at from the perusal of his Observers' statistics? In his essays individual comments are often used as the basis for a generalisation.

Unless these questions can be satisfactorily answered many of Mr. Harrison's assumptions must seem without adequate foundation.

Mr. Harrison further challenges and asks: Can the Films Division prove that it is not doing more harm than good? I think the most pertinent counter to such a question is: Can Mr. Harrison prove that he is in any way qualified to appraise such proof were it forthcoming?

Mr. Harrison makes great play of a small incident of a revolver in *Miss Grant Goes to the Door*. He does not quote his Mass Observers' reports on this film, but only offers his own observations. But *Miss Grant Goes to the Door* did its job, and due to its immediate release throughout the United Kingdom in just over six weeks, is known to have proved completely effective from a propaganda point of view. It was not intended to do any more than that, and it did not do any more.

Mr. Harrison complains that the Films Division tends to be out of touch with the simple reactions of industrial Lancashire and rural

Somerset. Even if the staff of the Films Division are out of direct touch, they have reports from cinema managers, Regional Officers and their own observers. In any case, the producers, directors and technicians who make the films are not living in an ivory tower in Bloomsbury, and the film trade and Fleet Street film critics certainly enjoy close and constant contact with public reaction towards films.

It is quite possible that the film industry needs social research, but so do many other industries, and I presume many arts, and perhaps even Mass Observation.

Mr. Harrison then gives "scientific evidence" on whether propaganda influenced people to join A.R.P. The information is no doubt correct concerning the people who were observed, but the Observers seem to have a complete misconception of the public services that have been provided by the films.

He says that in March, 1939, a survey of 1,000 voluntary A.R.P. wardens showed that only one per cent of them were influenced by films in taking their jobs, but the point which does not seem to have occurred to Mr. Harrison is that films at that time had hardly been used as a propaganda medium, and certainly no Ministry of Information films had been shown with the intention of persuading people to do A.R.P. work. Finally, Mr. Harrison does not say how many of the 1,000 wardens observed were regular cinema-goers.

Mr. Harrison complains that cinema managers do not advertise Ministry of Information shorts, with the result that people who see favourable reviews in the press of these films find difficulty in locating the cinemas at which they are being shown. The reason is that not one person in a thousand is persuaded to visit a cinema because a particular short film made by anybody is being shown. The average cinema-goer just cannot afford to have his cinema-going governed by shorts. It is only the feature films which attract.

Mr. Harrison deals with public criticism of

newsreels, but he does not say how many people were interviewed. About twenty million people go to the cinema weekly and unless one interviews a cross section of them the results (which he says have "no absolute validity") must also be regarded as having no value.

Mr. Harrison's article evokes in me the same reactions as an agnostic must feel towards the arguments of a *religieux*. Once you have accepted the existence of an all-good personal God, the rest is easy. So it is with this new faith in the powers and authority of Mass Observation. Have faith in it as an exact workable science, and there is no argument against its use in measuring public response to any and every social happening. But it seems to me that, as an exact and dependable gauge of opinion, it must be classed as a pseudo-science as open to thorough questioning as spiritualism, magic and kindred "phonies" for which there is a public demand rather than a social justification.

Mr. Harrison suggests a bureau concerned with research and using agreed and accurate criteria, etc., but he is apparently ignorant of the fact that the work he proposes for the bureau is already being done by people in the film industry—producers, distributors, theatre-owners—in a way no less scientific than Mass Observation. It will certainly not serve the film-going public or the Ministry of Information Films Division or the film industry to know what Mr. Harrison thinks the public thinks.

It seems to me that many of his "thinkings" are being subtly served up as recorded observation. Many theatre owners have tried their own "mass-observers" in the foyers and cafés of cinemas. Before, I think, Mass Observation was developed and presented as a science by Mr. Harrison, Bernstein had Observers at the end of microphones hidden in different parts of his Granada theatres. Although these listeners were people with a wide knowledge of films and public reaction to films, the comments they overheard were invariably so disjointed that they were of no value and there were many occasions when, although people leaving the theatre were overheard to say that they did not like the programme, business increased on the following days. Does not this prove once again that local cross sections of conversation cannot be accepted as a true gauge of public opinion?

A letter from Mr. Harrison, referring to the observations above, appears under Correspondence on the opposite page.

STANLEY IRVING.

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FILM SOCIETY NEWS

The Editorial Board of D.N.L. takes this opportunity of wishing all Film Societies successful and prosperous seasons in 1941. It is to be hoped that the arrival of the Blitz in various large cities will not unduly curtail the fine cultural work which has so far been achieved during the war by Film Societies in all parts of the country.

Manchester and Salford reports that it is resuming its activities in the New Year and that there will be monthly shows starting on the 25th of this month with Renoir's *La Marseillaise* (a very good choice); other features to be shown will be selected from *Quai des Brumes*, *Chapayev*, *Lenin in October*, and *Rois du Sport*. Shorts include *Home Front* (Jiri Weiss), *Fear and Peter Brown*, *Voice of the People*, and a U.S.S.R. cartoon called *Little Red Riding Hood*. The Society is also arranging joint shows with the Merseyside Film Institute Society; these will consist of sub-standard classics.

The Merseyside Film Institute Society is also planning a spring session.

Dundee and St. Andrews start the New Year with a record membership of 674. Five shows are planned.

The Belfast Film Institute Society continues to publish its admirable Bulletin. A recent issue contains the following account of the difficulties facing its organisers:—

"In the last two issues of the Review we confidently promised an early beginning of the season of repertory shows. In fact, but for an unlucky bomb the first show would have taken place already. Although there seem to have been little tangible results, these two months have been exceptionally busy ones for the Secretary: long and intricate negotiations have been in progress."

The shows planned for the next few months include *La Belle Equipe*, *Fredlos*, *Janasik* and *Le Quatorze Juillet*.

The Ayrshire Film Society has just completed the first half of its sixth season during which it has run five shows at fortnightly intervals on Sunday afternoons at the Empire, Kilmarnock, and on Sunday evenings at the Broadway, Prestwick. In earlier seasons meetings have been held at the Broadway, and last year, in addition, at the Regal, Saltcoats, the latter meetings, however, had to be suspended this season owing to transport difficulties. It was the first of the Scottish Societies to decide not only to carry on after the war but the only one to decide to increase its activities if possible during the war by the opening of a new branch first at Saltcoats; now at Kilmarnock. In addition to this it is running regular shows on 16 mm. sound for the Forces in the district, which are financed by the members. The Secretary, Mr. J. A. Paton Walker advises us that so far the season has been reasonably satisfactory despite a large drop in membership, at the outset, due to members being in the Forces. This has been compensated for to a certain extent by a surprising influx of new members, which confirmed the Council's policy in continuing.

Films have not been so varied as usual, reports the Secretary. Experimental stuff is lacking but

the programmes have, for the most part, not been too difficult to arrange, thanks to a hard working London Booking Agent and to the co-operation of a number of commercial renters now in Glasgow.

The shorts, although there has been a prevailing war background to most of them, have been varied as much as possible with a number of Disney Cartoons, *Mother Goose Goes Hollywood*, *Farmyard Symphony*, *Moth and the Flame*, and McLaren's *Love on the Wing* as lightening influences. A number of M.O.I. shorts have been shown almost on issue dates, the best of these being *The New Britain*, *Sea Fort*, *Religion and the People*, *Britain Can Take It*, *Air Communiqué* and *A Job to be Done*. While the main shorts included have been Eisenstein's *Death Day*, *Voice of the Vintage*, *Tell Me if it Hurts* (the third time) *Animals on Guard*, *Aircscrew*, *Men of Africa* and the extremely popular *Is Idleness a Vice?*

It is increasingly difficult to avoid a predominance of French Films among the features but, so far, in addition to *Femme du Boulanger*, *Mayerling* and *Remous* (a fill up this for a non-arrival), *Duck Soup*, *Dark Rapture* and *Zauber der Boheme* have been put on, which has avoided an over-emphasis.

The Council of the Society do not believe in composed programmes being shown more frequently than once in the season as shortage of films makes this difficult, but next half season the Council is considering a Sino-Japanese programme based on *Drame de Shanghai* and *The 400 Million*, and the Secretary would be glad of suggestions for shorts. Other films to be shown include *Alice in Switzerland*, *Accord Final*, *Tendre Ennemie* and *Le Roi S'Amuse*.

CORRESPONDENCE

FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT

SIR: The speech at the end of *Foreign Correspondent* has aroused such distinguished controversy that someone should record this simple probability: it has not the same meaning on the screen as in print.

I've seen the picture only twice, but with very different audiences, and each time the effect of the speech was to create sudden and intense enthusiasm. The lines which come through most clearly above background sound effects and the clatter of departing audience are: . . . AMERICA. KEEP THOSE LIGHTS BURNING THERE. COVER THEM WITH STEEL: RING THEM WITH GUNS. BUILD A

CANOPY OF BATTLESHIPS AND BOMBING PLANES. . . i.e. Wake up! Come in on our side!

Wishful thinking doubtless helps the misconception, but the mood of the speech is more infectious than the meaning.

Maybe James Hilton, Charles Bennett, Joan Harrison, John Grierson and other stray advisers from Hollywood's British Colony failed to see the tactlessness of the words, but I guess Hitch directed for the effect, and it's the screen effect which matters: argument ignoring this is academic.

Has there been any Mass Observation of coldness to that speech?

Yours, etc.

BRIAN SMITH

London, W.8.

MASS OBSERVATION

SIR: Mr. Ewart Hodgson's critique of mass-observation is along the lines with which I am very familiar. Ever since we began doing social research, we have had to answer these and many other criticisms over and over again. I am at present preparing a monograph of social research methods which will be published under the title, "The Public Mind," and I beg leave to postpone a detailed answer on all points until that occasion. This work will contain a special section of film research, and exact particulars of method. In the meanwhile, I should like to say that if we were really the pseudo-scientists which Mr. Hodgson has dubbed us, we would hardly have managed to continue our enlarged researches, through the difficulties of war. We have had to satisfy literally scores of Civil Servants, Advertising Agents, Propagandists, Psychologists, Sociologists and Administrators about the authenticity and accuracy of our methods. Since the outbreak of war we have been producing reports for various Government Departments, including Service Ministries as well as advertising and commercial interests. These reports have constantly borne the test of administrative use, and have frequently been checked through other information media. Our results have been found sufficiently accurate to lead both to major and minor administrative decisions which have proved successful. I put forward our film subject in Documentary News Letter with diffidence, because this is a field where much work remains to be done before anyone can speak with certainty. Mr. Hodgson hardly does justice to the carefulness with which I phrased my article.

Finally, I am sorry that Mr. Hodgson considers an independent film research bureau unnecessary, because (according to him) it is all being done already. I am confident, however, that the film industry will presently recognise that all is not being done. I know that Documentary News Letter is not the proper place for controversies on social research, yet I hope its readers will not have lost sight of the fact that it is not "box office" relation to the public that matters, as Mr. Hodgson seems to think; the subtler effects of the film are far more important and can affect not only people's cinema habits, but all their other habits. No one is at present watching the way in which the film affects contact in other fields or child attitudes for the

future. I doubt if even Mr. Hodgson can prove that this does not matter and has all been studied already.

Yours, etc.,

London,

December 1940.

TOM HARRISON

THE IMPERIAL THEME

SIR: I am very interested in your note, in December D.N.L., headed "The Imperial Theme". As you know I have had considerable experience in expeditionary films, largely within the Empire. I heartily agree with your suggestions.

One of the essentials to film making is the matter of introductions and permits. I have always found it easy to get introductions this end, Colonial Office, India Office, etc., etc. But these introductions by no means constitute permits for production. Very often the obtaining of permits depends on so many things quite unrelated to actual film making. For example in India, making a film in Delhi for a one-reeler, it was necessary to obtain no less than six different permits. This film was intended to carry a subtle propaganda message in favour of the British Empire. For the purpose of juxtaposition I wanted soldiers, and although I had excellent introductions to the Viceroy's house they only resulted in my being passed from one official to another, causing days of delay, until finally the possibility of production stood or fell with the Brigadier. It so happened that this choleric gentleman disapproved of Mae West, disliked films anyhow, and looked upon all film technicians as "box wallahs". Furthermore, he highly resented that his soldiers "should be used as film extras", and suggested that the British Army would lose face by being filmed. It was impossible to convince him that films could have any propaganda value.

This is a typical case. It must be said, however, that there are many officials who fully realise the value of the documentary film and are prepared to do everything within their power to help. In Palestine, in the height of the troubles there, the Police still found time to be interested in our films, and I am full of gratitude to the Police of Jerusalem, but the fact remains that we lost endless time interviewing official after official, obtaining permit after permit. Reading my diary over a number of years of production I find that days spent permit hunting vastly outnumber actual shooting days.

I am very enthusiastic about the imperial theme and Empire solidarity and would like to go on making films within the Empire, but cannot something be done to make documentary production easier? My suggestion is that this could be done by the establishment of a Central Film Bureau in London with powers of authorisation valid throughout the Empire. This office could get the bona fides of producers, taking into account previous films, etc., etc. This would cut out the possibility of the film being vetoed after the unit arrives in the country in question—and believe me, this can happen—and the Bureau should issue a sort of *laissez-passer* for producers which would guarantee the collaboration of the various officials and eliminate the endless and bitter delays of permit hunting.

That such a scheme can be practical has been proven (in my own experience) for it existed in Poland where it was run in conjunction with the Foreign Office; in Lithuania where it was run by a Junta of extremely efficient Lithuanian-American women; in Austria where foreign documentary producers were welcomed with open arms, and in Italy where it was run by the Ministry of Cultural Propaganda. In every case a liaison officer was provided who became a member of the unit for the duration of the production and it was never necessary to obtain any permits whatsoever—in fact, one could concentrate fully on the making of the film.

Yours, etc.,

H. M. NIETER

London,

December 1940.

BOOK REVIEW

In Defense of the Moovie by Sir Philip Sidney. Transcribed into modern English and brought up-to-date by E. W. and M. M. Robson. (H. & J. Pillans & Wilson, Edinburgh. One Shilling.)

Sir Philip Sidney's "In Defence of Posie" has been purloined in a successful attempt to make a sow's ear out of a silk purse. The trouble is not that a defence of poetry cannot also be a defence of cinema—it can—and the idea is a sound one. But the difficulty is, that, taking films as they come, there are few of them that are comparable with poems, and infinitesimally few with great verse.

No doubt the great Elizabethan's defence of poetry is meaningful and delightful. More than this, it is profound, therefore it is maladroitness to substitute "movie" for "posie" throughout and hope for the best. At any rate it has been done, with the following consequences:

"Now for the Moovie Maker he nothing affirms and therefore never lieth. For as I take it, to lie is to affirm to be true that which is false . . . But the Moovie Maker (as I said before) never affirmeth."

When the authors import their personal likes and dislikes we get this sort of thing:

"One excellent Moovie Picture of England's studios that deserveth commendation was *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*, in which there was much Poesie and teaching of Virtue, and Robert Donat most admirable therein, though in his showing the use of the cane by the Reverend Schoolmaster upon a pupil already man-grown, I dare not allow."

"Again, many things may be extolled in Oratory which cannot be shown in Moovie Pictures, wherein must our producers learn the difference between reporting and representing. Would the Russian Moovie Makers had but understood these matters in the making of their Talking Pictures, which in these days have so much to do with the weakness and brutality of men in past History, then indeed had the evil in their Moovie Pictures upon the mould of their Nation's mind been averted."

FILMS IN MEXICO

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The record of the Mexican Government's use of films for educational purposes is not a long one.

At the beginning of 1933, Narciso Bassols, Secretary of Education, formulated an extensive plan for the production and distribution of educational films with the collaboration of Carlos Chavez as chief of the Department of Fine Arts. The most important parts of this plan included the following:

- (a) The production of feature-length films in real surroundings, dealing with the major social questions of modern Mexico.
- (b) The production of short films on a wide variety of geographic, historical, artistic and scientific subjects.
- (c) The installation of sound-film projection equipment in all Mexican schools and local branches of the Secretariat of Education.
- (d) The equipment of travelling projection apparatus to reach districts lacking motion picture theatres.
- (e) The acquisition of scientific films from Europe and the U.S.

The basis of the plan was to supplement the general education programme and to show Mexico's reality to itself as well as to the outside world.

Two parts of this plan were immediately set in motion. The great American photographer, Paul Strand, then working in Mexico, was invited to assemble a filming group and superintend the production of *Redes*, a story of the working conditions of the fishermen on the Vera Cruz coast, to be photographed in the fishing village of Alvarado.

The installation of adequate sound-film equipment in the branches of the Secretariat of Education was begun in the Hidalgo Theatre in Mexico City.

When Sr. Bassols and Carlos Chavez resigned their posts over a year later this government theatre was ready for use, and *Redes*, now internationally known as *The Wave*, was nearing completion.

Aside from these two accomplishments, the remainder of the educational film project remained a project. The only feature film produced since *The Wave* by any Government department has been *Humanidad*, directed by Adolfo Best-Maugard and photographed by Agustin Kimenez for the National Lottery, within the semi-official Public Welfare organisation. Short films are sporadically produced by the Secretariats of Communication, Interior, etc., but without a systematic plan and without any centralised distribution scheme. The Mexican distribution of even *The Wave* has had to rely upon solely commercial channels in the same way that it has been shown in the United States and Europe.

The most powerful modern medium of communication of ideas has yet to be employed to a proper extent in the Mexican educational system, drawing for subjects from the many-sided richness of Mexican life.

NEWS FROM CANADA

Canadian production has sailed into the winter season under a full head of steam, with increasing film activity across the country and a big winter schedule of pictures forthcoming.

Four new pictures for the theatres, in the *Canada Carries On* series, are in various stages of production. Completed is *Letter from Camp Borden*, an introduction to Canada's biggest army camp, seen through the eyes of three young recruits. One is training as a machine-gunner; another is a motor-cycle driver in a mechanised unit; a third is a tank driver. The aim of the film is to get an intimate close-up of the human element behind a young, mechanised army.

Also completed is a French-language counterpart of the Camp Borden film, *Un du Vingt-Deux*, made at Valcartier camp in Quebec with a reinforcement battalion of the famous "Fighting Twenty-Second" whose main body is now in Britain.

The refugee children film, put aside after the death of Ruby Grierson, will be finished for release in December. John Taylor's material has been received from England, and Canadian footage has been shot by Roy Tash (Associated Screen News). The balance of the film will probably be shot in the Winnipeg district. The children will be shown in their Canadian homes and schools, and emphasis will be laid on their reaction to the Canadian winter, their growing American vocabulary, their interest (or lack of it) in the national abundance of ice cream, and their preparations for a Canadian Christmas. Evelyn Spice, at present on the Prairies, will shoot the Winnipeg sequences if her current picture for the Saskatchewan Co-operative Wheat Pool is finished in time to permit it. This film of the evacuee children will return to England as a report to the parents on the welfare and adjustment of their children in Canada.

J. D. Davidson, who arrived in Canada in mid-November, has been assigned to a navy film, to be made along the Eastern Canadian seaboard and the St. Lawrence river, describing the expansion of the Canadian navy and its wartime work of patrol and convoy. Some shooting has already been done by Roger Barlow, after his work on *Wings of Youth* and the Camp Borden film with Raymond Spottiswoode; but the main production job has been held for Davidson himself.

The fourth wartime picture in the *Canada Carries On* series will show the building of the tank units in the Canadian army. Special emphasis will be laid on the use of tanks in a war of movement, and on personnel of the tank regiments; all are young men, and most have been carefully chosen from mechanical occupations in civil life.

An additional wartime enterprise, distinct from the *Canada Carries On* series, has been begun with the first eight of a set of short films

on the 30-day draft army camps, which opened all across Canada on October 9. These films are made in the form of 350-ft. news items and follow the regular newsreel in the theatre programmes. They concentrate not so much on military training as on the domestic comforts of the camps, the food, recreations, friendships. They are made for showing in the same districts as the camps, for the information of relatives and friends of the drafted men. The first eight, which were made in Montreal by two local units, Cinecraft and Associated Screen News, are about Quebec camps and are commentated in French. These first *Carte Postale* shorts, informative and newsy, were snatched up by exhibitors at \$25 a subject, although the Film Board had planned at first to give them free. If they continue to be successful, many more "Postcard Specials" may be made on the other draft camps in districts right across Canada.

Interest in the colour film has increased with the shooting of a 16mm. Kodachrome subject on the art of A. Y. Jackson, a founder of the celebrated Canadian School of Seven. Jackson was accompanied on his annual Autumn trip into the Laurentian country of Northern Ontario by colour producer Radford Crawley. The film shows, first, the country Jackson loves to paint, its quality and size and colour values; second, the selective, interpretive process whereby landscape becomes art. Crawley's experience in colour shooting has confirmed much experimental work in Britain. Dull or diffuse light, deliberate over- or under-exposure, have been

found helpful in accentuating form and reducing violent colour values to a more reasonable key.

Two more Kodachrome pictures are near completion—one on the city of Ottawa, set in the Gatineau Hills and another on Canadian birds. Both these films as well as the Jackson picture were made by Crawley.

From the West Coast, a new 35mm. Cinecolor release has been made by Leon Shelley (Vancouver). This is a tourist picture about British Columbia, for U.S. distribution, and is the first big picture from an independent commercial unit. Recording and commentary were done in Hollywood.

The growing importance of Canada's huge tourist traffic, with reference to foreign exchange, is reflected in the coming policy of close co-operation between the Tourist Bureau and the National Film Board. Travel pictures in colour for U.S. distribution will probably be the result of such co-operation.

The new U.S. public interest in Canadian life and government, which has awakened suddenly in the past year, is seen in the presence here of two March of Time units, working on their second Canadian film within a year. They are shooting material for a picture on the country and people of Canada, as distinct from the earlier release covering the war effort. Object of the issue will be to promote knowledge among the American people of their Northern neighbour who is now a vital part of the New World defence system.

Britain at Bay, released in Canada in October, by the Canadian Film Board, commanded considerable attention and was well and thoughtfully received across Canada. *London Can Take It* created immense interest in the U.S.A., and probably reached some 15,000 theatres. Special credit is given to Quentin Reynolds' commentary, both as a splendid and forceful job, and as an astute stroke of propaganda.

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FANTASIA

A review of Disney's great Cinesymphony, Reproduced by permission of Times Magazine of America

STRANGE and wonderful are the premières (pronounced "premeers") of Hollywood: the trappings of publicity; the lights and decorations painting the gaudy lily of the Carthay Circle Theatre (where the big premières are held); the pushing, star-gazing crowds; the troops of real live stars ("I seen him! Didja see her?"). This week Manhattan sees a première stranger and more wonderful than any of Hollywood's. The celebrities present, the publicity, the lights on the marquee, may be lost in the blare and blaze of Broadway. But strangeness and wonder belong to the show itself. It is Walt Disney's latest, called *Fantasia*.

As the audience enters and the theatre fills with the sweet confusion of an orchestra tuning up, there are no musicians in the pit. As the curtains part, a huge symphony orchestra appears hazily, on the screen. Before it steps a thin, grinning, bald-headed man. He introduces himself as Deems Taylor, welcomes the audience, on behalf of Leopold Stokowski and Walt Disney, to "an entirely new form of entertainment". When he finishes, Leopold Stokowski himself, his back to the audience, steps into the picture, raises his arms, and the great orchestra swirls into Bach's *D Minor Toccata and Fugue*.

The music comes not simply from the screen, but from everywhere; it is as if a hearer were in the midst of the music. As the music sweeps to a climax, it froths over the proscenium arch, boils into the rear of the theatre, all but prances up and down the aisles. The hazy orchestra begins to dissolve, and weird, abstract ripples and filaments begin an unearthly ballet in Technicolor.

This is the beginning of a symphony concert—but what a concert! Illustrated by Walt Disney; written by Bach, Beethoven, Stravinsky, Dukas, Tchaikovsky, Moussorgsky, Schubert; conducted by Deems Taylor; played by the Philadelphia Orchestra. Mickey and Stokowski together put on a brand-new act.

When Stokowski's orchestra swings into Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker Suite*, the ballet on the screen turns into flowers, fairies, fish, falling leaves, mushrooms. Mickey Mouse appears in the title role of Paul Dukas' *Sorcerer's Apprentice*, with silent gusto steals the bearded sorcerer's magic cap, commands the broom to fetch water, forgets how to stop it, nearly drowns in the deluge that follows. To Igor Stravinsky's rip-roaring *Rite of Spring*, a primeval world, complete with dinosaurs, bubbles up, parades by, dies down. To Moussorgsky's spooky *Night on Bald Mountain*, hobgoblins and beldams ride their brooms. To Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony*, centaurs and centaurettes, Pegasus, Mrs. Pegasus and a nestful of little Pegasi gambol and fly; Bacchus and his crew get a good drenching when the storm comes up. The whole cine-

symphony concert lasts two hours and a half (intermission included).

Containing everything from the Pierian well water of Johann Sebastian Bach to the violet-bordered stream of Schubert's *Ave Maria*, *Fantasia* is a long succession of very large orders. Some of these orders (the flower, fish and mushroom dances of the *Nutcracker Suite*, the hulking, saurian epic of Stravinsky's *Rite*, the eerie, fantastic *Night on Bald Mountain*) are so beautifully filled that they may leave callous critics whispering incredulously to themselves. Others (Mickey's *Sorcerer's Apprentice*, the hilarious ostrich and hippopotamus ballets) set a new high in Disney animal muggery. Others (the wave and cloud sequences of Bach's *Fugue*, and a queer series of explosive music visualisations performed by a worried and disembodied sound track, posing diffidently on the screen like a reluctant wire) recall the abstract cinemovies made about five years ago by New Zealand-born Len Lye, show how musical sensation may be transferred to visual images.

It would have taken a Gustave Doré to do justice to the big beauty of Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony*. No Doré, Disney peoples his classical Olympus with smirking "centaurettes", smirkingly brassiered, with calf-eyed centaurs and kewpie-doll cupids, makes Bacchus' bacchanale look like a nursery lemonade party, leaves his audience wondering whether he is serious, or merely trying to be cute by putting diapers on Olympus.

But, though Disney's toddling cannot keep pace with the giant strides of Ludwig van Beethoven, *Fantasia* as a whole leaves its audience gasping. Critics may deplore Disney's lapses of taste, but he trips, Mickey-like, into an art form that immortals from Aeschylus to Richard Wagner have always dreamed of.

Mickey began it. The idea for *Fantasia* had been germinating in Disney's mild-looking head for several years. Even before he did *Snow White* he had a vague notion of some day doing a serious opera in animovie style. As early as 1929 he raided the high-brow symphonic repertory to make Saint-Saens' bone-rattling *Danse Macabre* into a Silly Symphony. But the idea did not really sprout until early in 1938, when Leopold Stokowski, on a visit to Hollywood, begged Disney to let him conduct the music for *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, a Mickey Mouse short. Disney didn't know what he was letting himself in for.

By the time Stokowski's recordings were done, and the animation half finished, the *Apprentice* began to look too good for a short, too expensive for anything but a feature. Before it was finished, white-haired Maestro Stokowski had come out with so many other bright ideas for symphonic animovies that Disney's ambition near-

went past itself. Calling ace Musi-commentator Deems Taylor from Manhattan to help with advice, Stokowski and Disney decided to build around Mickey Mouse's sorcery act a whole programme of cinesymphonies.

Keeping his 1,200 artists, animators, sound engineers and helpers mum, Walt Disney started work, soon got the machinery of his new \$3,000,000 Burbank, Calif., studio rolling on *Fantasia*. Deciding to go the whole artistic hog, they picked the highest of high-brow classical music. To do right by this music, the old mouse opera comedy was not enough. The Disney studio went high-brow wholesale, and Disney technicians racked their brains for stuff that would startle and awe rather than tickle the audience.

Stokowski worked in Philadelphia's mellow and acoustically perfect old Academy of Music, recording his symphonic accompaniments on sound tracks. This time he worked, not with the Hollywood pickup band that had recorded Mickey's *Sorcerer's Apprentice*, but with his own famed, seasoned Philadelphia Orchestra. For this recording job, no ordinary cinema sound equipment would do. So Disney's ace sound engineer, rangy, Brooklyn-born Bill Garity, developed a whole new system of gadgets capable of catching each section of the Philadelphia Orchestra on a separate sound track. By branding and patching these sound tracks on to a four-ply master track, he could control the faintest breath of every last bassoon. In their recording operations Garity and Stokowski used 430,000 feet of sound track, cut and patched it eventually into 11,953 feet. When the recordings were played back in a specially equipped studio in Hollywood, brother engineers were astounded to hear Soundman Garity's sound follow characters across the screen, roar down from the ceiling, whisper behind their backs. R.C.A. and Disney engineers, having built his equipment at a cost of \$85,000, called it "Fantasound", and crowed that it would revolutionise cinema production like nothing since the invention of Technicolor.

Meanwhile the Disney lot rang with the sound of classical music. Patient engineers who had never been to a concert in their lives listened to 35 to 710 performances of each composition, ended up whistling Bach, Beethoven and even Stravinsky at breakfast. Idea men, working on the dulcet strains of Beethoven's *Sixth Symphony*, winced at the bedlam of Stravinsky's *Rite* which other technicians were playing next door. (The *Rite* finally had to be quarantined in a special corner of the lot, where its boom-lay-booms could be studied without disturbing the whole studio.)

Stravinsky's *Rite*, which has caused high-brow audiences to rise, shout and pound on their

neighbours' skulls in ecstasy, offered a serious problem. To match its cosmic hullabaloo, nothing less than a planetary cataclysm would do. So Disney men began studying nebulae and comets at California's Mount Wilson Observatory, mugged up on theories of protozoic life, earthquakes and other geologic upheavals, did portraits of every prehistoric monster in Manhattan's American Museum of Natural History.

One of them, studying lightning flashes by reclining on a Los Angeles curbstone in a pouring rain, was rushed to headquarters by suspicious police. Famed paleontologists like Barnum Brown of Manhattan's American Museum of Natural History and Chester Stock of California Institute of Technology, were called in for advice. A herd of pet guianas and a baby alligator wriggled over the Burbank lot, while animators studied their lizardry movements. By the time a complete cast had been rounded up for the *Rite*, the Disney zoo contained eusthenopteron, brachiosaurs, brontosaurus, plesiosaurs, mesosaurs, diplodocuses, triceratopses, pterodactyls, trachodons, struthiomimuses, stegosaurs, archaopteryxes, pteranodons, tyrannosaurs and enough plain run-of-the-Jurassic dinosaurs to people a planet. Studio cameras groaned under the burden of the whole story of evolution.

For Moussorgsky's halloweenish *Night on Bald Mountain*, Disney went outside his own studio for talent, got famed Fairy-Tale Illustrator Kay Nielson (*East of the Sun and West of the Moon*)

to design graveyards and ghosts, ended with a Walpurgis nightmare calculated to turn little children's hair white. But Illustrator Nielson's jagged scenes, plus a new high in animation technique, made it by far *Fantasia's* best act. As *Fantasia* took shape, a whole new troupe of Disney comic characters appeared: Hop Low, the self-thwarting little mushroom, who tries to do the Chinese Dance from Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker Suite*, but can't keep up with the big mushrooms; Ben Ali Gator, premier danseur of an ostrich ballet set to Ponchielli's corny *Dance of the Hours*; Susan, the hippopotamus ballerina whose blimp-like cavortings in a *pas de deux* with Ben Ali Gator literally brings down the house in a wreck of flying plaster; Bacchus and his donkey Jacchus, who trip and roll through the Grant Woodland scape of Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony*.

Long before *Fantasia* was finished, expenses began to mount, and fellow-Hollywoodians began to whisper again about "Disney's Folly". With \$200,000 spent on Stokowski's fancy recordings, and a technical bill that overtops *Snow White's*, the total figure for the production amounted to \$2,250,000. Because Engineer Garity's new sound mechanism, is so complicated and expensive, only twelve theatres at a time will be equipped to show *Fantasia*, and R.C.A. sound-equipment manufacturers figure that it will take several years before small-town cinema houses can get the gadgets to perform it. For the present,

Fantasia will not be distributed like ordinary films, but will tour the U.S. like twelve road-show companies. But Walt Disney expects *Fantasia* to run for years, "perhaps even after I am gone."

An imposing list of top-flight contemporary composers (Paul Hindemith, Serge Prokofieff, William Grant Still, Deems Taylor, *et. al*) have vowed that they would spend their lives working for Disney if he would give them the chance. Composer Igor Stravinsky himself has signed a contract to do more music with Disney, has blandly averred that Disney's paleontological cataclysm was what he had had in mind all along in his *Rite of Spring*. Musicians and sound engineers who came to hear Soundman Garity's gadgets perform found that such recording had never before been even approached. Music lovers crowed that more ears would be saved for Beethoven by *Fantasia* than by all the symphonic lecture-recitalists in the U.S. The New York Academy of Sciences asked for a private showing of the *Rite of Spring* because they thought its dinosaurs better science than whole museum-loads of fossils and taxidermy.

Meanwhile sharp-faced Cinemartist Disney just crossed his fingers. Said he: "Art is never conscious. Things that have lived were seldom planned that way. If you follow that line, you're on the wrong track. We don't even let the word 'art' be used around the studio. If anyone begins to get arty, we knock them down. What we strive for is entertainment."

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Borrowers of films are asked to apply as much in advance as possible, to give alternative booking dates, and to return the films immediately after use. H. A hire charge is made.

F. Free distribution. Sd. Sound. St. Silent.

Association of Scientific Workers, 30 Bedford Row, W.C.1. Scientific Film Committee. *Graded List of Films*. A list of scientific films from many sources, classified and graded for various types of audience. On request, Committee will give advice on programme make-up and choice of films.

Austin Film Library. 24 films of motoring interest, industrial, technical and travel. Available only from the *Educational Films Bureau*, Tring, Herts. 35 mm. & 16 mm. Sd. & St. F.

Australian Trade Publicity Film Library. 18 films of Australian life and scenery. Available from the *Empire Film Library*. 35 mm. & 16 mm. Sd. & St. F. 3, sound films on 9.5 mm. available from *Pathescope*.

British Commercial Gas Association, Gas Industry House, 1 Grosvenor Place, S.W.1. Films on social subjects, domestic science, manufacture of gas. 35 mm. & 16 mm. Sd. & a few St. F.

British Council Film Department, 25 Saville Row, W.1. *Films of Britain*, 1940. Catalogue for overseas use only but provides useful synopses of 100 sound and silent documentary films.

British Film Institute, 4 Great Russell Street, W.C.1. (a) *National Film Library*. An important collection of documentary and other films. Available only to full members of B.F.I. 35 mm. & 16 mm. Sd. & St. H. (b) *Some British and Foreign Documentary and other Short Films*. A general list of films and sources. (c) *Early Films*. Films 1896-1934 still available in Britain.

British Instructional Films, 111 Wardour Street, W.1. Feature films; Pathé Gazettes and Pathe-tones; a good collection of nature films. A new catalogue is in preparation. 16 mm. Sd. & St. H.

Canadian Pacific Film Library. 15 films of Canadian life and scenery. Available from the *Empire Film Library*. 16 mm. Sd. & St. F.

Canadian Government Exhibitions and Publicity. A wide variety of films. Available from the *Empire Film Library*.

Central Film Library, Imperial Institute, S.W.7. Has absorbed the *Empire Film Library* and the *G.P.O. Film Library*. Also contains all new M.O.I. non-theatrical films. No general catalogue yet issued. A hand list of M.O.I. films is available. 35 mm. & 16 mm. Sd. & St. F.

Coal Utilisation Joint Council, General Buildings, Aldwych, London, W.C.2. Films on production of British coal and miners' welfare. 35 mm. & 16 mm. Sd. F.

Crookes' Laboratories, Gorst Road, Park Royal, N.W.10. *Colloids in Medicine*. 35 mm. & 16 mm. Sd. F.

Dartington Hall Film Unit, Totnes, South Devon. Classroom films on regional and economic geography. 16 mm. St. H.

Dominion of New Zealand Film Library. 415 Strand, W.C.2. 22 films of industry, scenery and sport. Includes several films about the Maoris. 16 mm. St. F.

Educational Films Bureau, Tring, Herts. A selection of all types of film. 35 mm. & 16 mm. Sd. & St. F.

Educational General Services, 37 Golden Square, W.1. A wide selection of films, particularly of overseas interest. Some prints for sale. 16 mm. & St. H.

Electrical Development Association, 2 Savoy Hill, Strand, W.C.2. Four films of electrical interest. Further films of direct advertising appeal are available to members of the Association only. 16 mm. Sd. & St. F.

Empire Film Library. Films primarily of Empire interest, with a useful subject index. Now merged with the *Central Film Library*. 16 mm. and a few 35 mm. Sd. & St. F.

Ensign Film Library, 88-89 High Holborn, London, W.C.1. Wide selection of all types of films including fiction, comedies, documentaries, films of geography, animal life, industry. Some prints for outright sale. 16 mm. St. & a few Sd. H.

Film Centre, 34 Soho Square, W.1. *Mouvements Vibratoires*. A film on simple harmonic motion. French captions. 35 mm. & 16 mm. St. H.

Ford Film Library, Dagenham, Essex. Some 50 films of travel, engineering, scientific and comedy interest. 35 mm. & 16 mm. Sd. & St. F.

Gaumont-British Equipments, Film House, Wardour Street, W.1. Many films on scientific subjects, geography, hygiene, history, language, natural history, sport. Also feature films. 35 mm. & 16 mm. Sd. & St. H.

G.P.O. Film Library. Over 100 films, mostly centred round communications. Now merged with the *Central Film Library*. 35 mm., 16mm. Sd. & St. F.

Kodak, Ltd., Kingsway, W.C.2. (a) *Kodascope Library*. Instructional, documentary, feature, western, comedy. Strong on early American comedies. 16 mm. & 8 mm. St. H. (A separate *List of Educational Films*, extracted from the above, is also published. A number of films have teaching notes.) (b) *Medical Film Library*. Circulation restricted to members of medical profession. Some colour films. Some prints for outright sale. 16 mm. St. H.

March of Time, Dean House, 4 Dean Street, W.1. Selected *March of Time* items, including *Inside Nazi Germany*, *Battle Fleets of Britain*, *Canada at War*. 16 mm. Sd. H.

Mathematical Films. Available from B. G. D. Salt, 5 Carlingford Road, Hampstead, N.W.3. Five mathematical films suitable for senior classes. 16 mm. & 9.5 mm. St. H.

Metropolitan-Vickers Electrical Co., Ltd., Trafford Park, Manchester 17. *Planned Electrification*, a film on the electrification of the winding and surface gear in a coal mine. Available for showing to technical and educational groups. 16 mm. Sd. F.

Ministry of Food Film Library, Neville House, Page Street, S.W.1, or from District Officers. 23 films mostly on cooking, nutrition and kindred subjects. 35 mm. & 16 mm. Sd. & St. F.

Pathescope, North Circular Road, Cricklewood, N.W.2. Wide selection of silent films, including cartoons, comedies, drama, documentary, travel, sport. Also good selection of early American and German films. 9.5 mm. Sd. & St. H.

Petroleum Films Bureau, 15 Hay Hill, Berkeley Square, W.1. Some 25 technical and documentary films. 35 mm. & 16 mm. Sd. & St. F.

Religious Film Library, Church Walk, Duns-table, Beds. Films of religious and temperance appeal. Also list of supporting films from other sources. 35 mm. & 16 mm. Sd. & St. H.

Scottish Central Film Library, 2 Newton Place, Charing Cross, Glasgow, C.3. A wide selection of teaching films from many sources. Contains some silent Scots films not listed elsewhere. Library available to groups in Scotland only. 16 mm. Sd. & St. H.

Sound-Film Services, 27 Charles Street, Cardiff. Library of selected films including Massingham's *And So to Work*. *Rome* and *Sahara* have French commentaries. 16 mm. Sd. H.

South African Railways Publicity and Travel Bureau, South Africa House, Trafalgar Square, W.C.2. 10 films of travel and general interest. 35 mm. & 16 mm. Sd. & 4 St. versions. F.

Southern Railway, General Manager's Office, Waterloo Station, S.E.1. Seven films (one in colour) including *Building an Electric Coach*, *South African Fruit* (Southampton Docks to Covent Garden), and films on seaside towns. 16 mm. St. F.

Wallace Heaton, Ltd., 127 New Bond Street, W.1. Three catalogues. Sound 16 mm., silent 16 mm., silent 9.5 mm. Sound catalogue contains number of American feature films, including *Thunder Over Mexico*, and some shorts. Silent 16 mm. catalogue contains first-class list of early American, German and Russian features and shorts, 9.5 catalogue has number of early German films and wide selection of early American and English slapstick comedies. 16 mm. & 9.5 mm. Sd. & St. H.

Workers' Film Association, 145 Wardour Street, W.1. Films of democratic and co-operative interest. Notes and suggestions for complete programmes. Some prints for sale. 35 mm. & 16 mm. Sd. & St. H.

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Reproduced from
"Kinematograph Weekly,"
26th December, 1940

FILMS are to play a large part in the Ministry of Food's campaign to instruct housewives in the preparation of economical meals.

Five non-theatrical "five-minute" food films were shown in the Ministry of Information's private theatre last week.

These are the first of a series which will be shown to women's organisations all over the country, both in cookery classes and with other films giving more general information about food in war time.

All the films shown were produced by Verity Films and directed by J. Gardner Lewis at the Riverside Studios, with S. D. Onions at the camera. . . .

J. Gardner Lewis is to be congratulated on the excellent direction of these productions. Each one in a simple, yet forceful, manner delivers its message and they are certain to have the desired effect on the housewives of Britain.

A tribute should be paid to Max Munden, who both wrote and spoke the commentary. He has just the right impersonal intonation to put across the commentary, which is concise without being condescending.

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